

Dec 12 2005 - Slaughter Highlights Pattern of Republican Abuse of Power and Misgovernment in Federal

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Calls for Reform as Voting Rights, Redistricting, OTC Emergency Contraception, Public Broadcasting Fall Victim to Unchecked Partisanship

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28) today highlighted the unending pattern of abuse of power and corrupt governance so tightly linked to the current Republican Administration and called for immediate reform. Her remarks came in response to reports this weekend that the Department of Justice will now prevent staff attorneys from making recommendations in major Voting Rights Act cases. The decision is a clear attempt to hide the Majority's past redistricting abuses in Texas and other states, abuses which staff attorneys have made more visible, and to politicize a government function which should remain impartial.

"The decision of the Department of Justice isn't an isolated incident. It's the most recent example of the pattern of abuse and misgovernment this Administration has brought to Washington," Rep. Slaughter said. "We are witnessing the undermining of some of the most vital elements of our federal government. This Administration has no desire to subject its ideas on any issue to either the impartial scrutiny of career professionals or to the honest evaluation of the American people. It is obsessed with getting its way and hiding its failings. Those with dissenting viewpoints, no matter how knowledgeable they may be, are eliminated instead of consulted. The result has been the whittling away of institutions the citizens of this nation have trusted for generations to keep them safe and to keep our country moving in the right direction."

"Unless we return our government agencies to those who put the well-being of the people first, instead of handing them to special interests and blatant ideologues who force minority positions on the majority of America, bad policy and corrupt governance will continue to be what most individuals associate with this White House and this Republican Leadership," Rep. Slaughter concluded.

BACKGROUND

Partisan senior officials driven by extreme right-wing political ideology are now controlling the decision making process in numerous federal government agencies, having shut out impartial, career agency experts and professional staff from their previous positions of influence.

Reports of senior Bush political appointees overruling agency experts and professional staff recommendations on crucial agency decisions are numerous and well documented.

The routine manner in which agency protocol has been abandoned and the recommendations of non-partisan professional staffers overruled indicates the ongoing abuse of power, corruption, and misgovernment within major federal agencies.

Politics and partisanship have come to be valued more than expertise and established law, directly impacting the lives of millions of Americans.

Recent examples of this include:

- DOJ BANS EXPERT STAFF OPINIONS IN VOTING RIGHTS CASES:

"The Justice Department has barred staff attorneys from offering recommendations in major Voting Rights Act cases, marking a significant change in the procedures meant to insulate such decisions from politics." [Dan Eggen, "Staff Opinion Banned in Voting Rights Cases," The Washington Post, 12/12/05]

- DOJ APPOINTEES DISGARDED STAFF CONCLUSIONS THAT THE TEXAS REDISTRICTING PLAN WAS ILLEGAL:

"Reports indicate that senior administration officials overruled Department of Justice staff's finding of Tom DeLay's Texas redistricting plan was illegal. Senior administration officials completely disregarded a memo endorsed by six lawyers and two analysts in the department's voting section, which concluded that the landmark Texas congressional redistricting plan spearheaded by indicted Rep. Tom DeLay (R) violated the Voting Rights Act. The memo found that Republican lawmakers and state officials who helped craft the redistricting proposal were aware it posed a high risk of being ruled discriminatory compared with other options. [Dan Eggen, "Justice Staff Saw Texas Districting As Illegal," The Washington Post, 12/2/05]

- DOJ EXECUTIVES DISREGARDED STAFF RECOMMENDATION TO REJECT GEORGIA VOTER-ID LAW FOR BEING DISCRIMINATORY:

"The decision to overrule of the DOJ staff's finding is the second example of senior officials at DOJ making questionable decisions concerning voting laws. Less than a month ago another report surfaced detailing how higher-ranking officials at Justice over-ruled department lawyers and analysts' recommendation to reject a voter-identifications law which was likely to discriminate against black voters. [Dan Eggen, "Criticism of Voting Law was Over-Ruled," The Washington Post, 11/17/05]

- TOP FDA OFFICIALS REFUSED TO APPROVE OVER-THE-COUNTER EMERGENCY CONTRACEPTION, THOUGH RECOMMENDED BY STAFF:

Just recently, the Government Accountability Office released a "smoking gun" report documenting the reasons behind the Food and Drugs Administration's (FDA) recent refusal to approve the over-the-counter sale of Plan B emergency contraception. The report found that there were 4 unusual aspects to the FDA's decision in May 2004 to not approve Barr Laboratories' application for over-the-counter sales of Plan B. [11/14/05]

- EXXON-MOBIL LOBBYING THE WHITE HOUSE TO APPOINT HARLAN WATSON, AN OIL INDUSTRY FAVORITE IN CLIMATE CONTROL NEGOTIATIONS:

Oil-industry favorite Harlan Watson is being used to peddle the administration's position on air-pollution policies.

"A Feb. 6, 2001, fax sent to the White House by oil giant Exxon Mobil proposed involving Watson more closely in international climate negotiations. The document -- which Exxon Mobil spokesman Russ Roberts said was sent by the company but not written by any of its employees -- suggested asking House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.) to make Watson, who at the time worked for the House Science Committee -- "available to work with the team" of Americans attending international climate change meetings." [Juliet Eilperin, "Climate Official's Work is Questioned," The Washington Post, 12/5/05]

- FORMER CORPORATION OF PUBLIC BROADCASTING CHAIRMAN ILLEGALLY PRESSURED TV STATIONS TO AIR MORE PROGRAMS REFLECTING THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S POLITICAL VIEWS:

Although federal law prohibits the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) from linking its funding for Public Broadcasting System (PBS) stations to their respective programming decisions, the CPB's Inspector General recently concluded that former Chairman Kenneth Tomlinson did just that. The report found that Tomlinson, a Bush appointee and personal friend of Karl Rove, illegally interfered with PBS programming by promoting the conservative talk show, "The Journal Editorial Report," and threatening to withhold funds if PBS executives did not add the show to their broadcast schedules. [Office of Inspector General Kenneth A. Konz, "Review of Alleged Actions Violating The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, as Amended," Corporation for Public Broadcasting Office of Inspector General, 11/15/05]